Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Strategies in Nigeria: Balancing Security and Human Rights

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Abstract

Terrorism is a complex global issue that has significantly impacted the security of human life and property. This has necessitated various counter-terrorism strategies in Nigeria. However, counter-terrorism strategies that are intended to address the menace have frequently engendered some human rights abuses. Thus, this paper examined terrorism and counter-terrorism strategies in Nigeria with a view to balancing security and human rights. It made use of desk review, while the public choice theory was adopted as framework of analysis. The paper argued that terrorism in Nigeria dated back to the era of slavery, where European imperialists exploited human resources and transformed over the years with serious negative impacts. It was revealed that various counter-terrorism strategies which included the conciliatory, criminal justice and military models were adopted by country though the military model was prioritised. The paper revealed that counter-terrorism strategies adopted often infringed on citizens' rights to life, privacy, unlawful arrest, detention and torture, personal security, freedom of association and discrimination against people arrested as suspects of terrorism charges. It concluded that security agencies during counter-terrorism operations on many occasions, end-up violating rights of the people in the country. It recommended, among others, that government should set up judicial investigation into the abuses of security forces' counter-terrorism operations and ensure that those found guilty be punished. Also, the government should ensure that counter-terrorism strategies adhere strictly to international humanitarian law, with a view to prioritising civilian protection and human rights.

Keywords: counter-terrorism strategies, human rights, security, terrorism.

1. Introduction

Security and human rights are crucial in today's society, with the government's statutory responsibility to protect life and property from threats (Ibe, 2024). However, Nigeria, like other Third World nations, faces numerous security threats, including communal and religious conflict, banditry, herder-farmer crisis, ritual killings, armed robbery, electoral violence, kidnapping and most especially terrorism, all of which undermine the enjoyment of human rights, as well as the security of life and property (Agbu *et al.*, 2020). Terrorism in Nigeria takes many

different forms, including banditry, kidnapping and suicide bombing (Edmond & Henri, 2020).

Terrorist acts were initially disorganised and incoherent but has over-time rapidly spread, causing numerous deaths, destruction of property and posing significant threats to country's national security (Akubo & Okolo, 2019). For instance, over 5550 acts of terrorism occurred in Nigeria between 1970 and 2020 (Global Terrorism Database, 2022). The Global Terrorism Index (2020) ranked Boko Haram as the deadliest terrorist organisation in sub-Saharan Africa and the second-deadliest terrorist organisation in 2019. Between 2011 and 2021, Boko Haram was also accountable for more than 40,600 deaths in Nigeria (Campbell, 2021; Global Terrorism Index, 2020).

In order to ensure the security and rights of everyone residing within its borders against terrorist attacks, as required by law, the Nigerian government employed an array of counter-terrorism strategies (Nyadera & Bincof, 2019). Counter-terrorism strategies are a collection of methods, approaches, and plans that the government or any organisation uses to stop or lessen terrorist attacks (Ikedinma, 2021). Thus, due to the significant security issues caused by terrorism in the country, the government implemented stringent counter-terrorism strategies that cut across the conciliatory model, the criminal justice (due process) model and the military model (Okoye & Adejoh, 2025). The kinetic counter-terrorism strategies, which are the military model, such as the Multinational Joint Taskforce (MNJTF), Operations Restore Order I, II and III, and Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), among others, have been the preferred strategy, with the goal to destroy terrorism and retake the areas they controlled in the country (Ugwueze & Onuoha, 2020).

Although counter-terrorism strategies are intended to stop or prevent terrorism, minimise civilian casualties and maintain respect for human rights, they frequently give rise to serious worries about human rights abuses. Evidence indicates a totally different outcome in the application of counter-terrorism strategies because of the incessant reports of human rights abuses by security operatives in Nigeria. For instance, a number of examples of extra-judicial executions, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and widespread abuses were recorded (Amnesty International, 2022). Also, security forces stationed at Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, being temporary housing for terrorist victims, have been linked to persistent rights abuses (Okoye & Adejoh, 2025). These incidents highlight the conflict between upholding international human

rights norms and maintaining national security. Therefore, understanding the balance between counter-terrorism strategies and human rights is essential, particularly if the counter-terrorism strategies violate human rights, intensify repression, stigmatise or alienate particular populations. Against this backdrop, this paper examined terrorism and counter-terrorism strategies in Nigeria, with a view to striking a balance between security and human rights.

The paper aside from the introduction is divided into five sections. Literature Review consists of the conceptual clarification and theoretical framework are discussed in the second section. Methodology is in the third section. Results and Discussions are presented in the fourth section. While the six section gives the conclusion and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

Conceptual Clarification

Terrorism

Terrorism is a complex phenomenon that cannot be pin-down to a universal definition. Thus, there is no one universally acceptable definition for terrorism. It is a concept with many political, social and legal connotations, with some defining it as criminal act, while others view it as a legitimate self-determination (Ekpo, 2016; Okoye & Adejoh, 2025). At its core, terrorism is the deliberate use of force and threats against civilians in order to further political, religious, or ideological goals (Alaba & Agbaje, 2024). Terrorism has been described as the threat or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion or intimidation (Global Terrorism Database, 2022).

In another view, terrorism is the use or threat of action, designed to intimidate the general public or a specific group of people, or is done to further an ideological, religious or political cause. It involves serious violence against a person, serious property damage, endangering the life of someone other than the perpetrator, posing a serious risk to the public's health or safety, or is meant to seriously interfere with or disrupt an electronic system (Adedire *et al.*, 2016; Onuoha, 2013). Terrorism is the employment of violent activities to intimidate local residents in an attempt to forward a political objective (Agbonika, 2017). Therefore, in order to classify a violent action as terrorism, it has to have a well-defined goal - the desire to threaten or coerce; and not a valid act of war (Hunter *et al.*, 2021). Terrorism therefore, in line

with the foregoing, is the use of violence against civilians in order to intimidate or create pervasive fear for the purpose of achieving social, political, religious, ideological or economic objectives.

Counter-Terrorism Strategies

The concept of counter-terrorism strategies has been defined in a number of ways. Counter-terrorism strategies are the term used to describe the methods and plans used by the government or its agencies to counter terrorist threats. It includes both the detection of possible acts and the reaction to associated events to terrorism (Ikedinma, 2021). Counter-terrorism strategies also refer to a comprehensive set of political, economic, social and security measures meant to put an end to and stop armed conflict, establish and preserve stable political, economic and social structures, and address the root causes of terrorism in order to create and maintain the conditions required for long-term stability (Amadi & Akaakar, 2023; Liolio, 2013). It is a type of security that includes both offensive and defensive tactics that governments employ to reduce their susceptibility to terrorist attacks and to contain, deter and violently respond to acts of terrorism. These tactics are used in conjunction with any backup plans, such as emergency protocols that can respond to terrorist attacks and restrict their operational area (Abdulrasheed, 2021).

Counter-terrorism strategies refer to the military phrase for combating an armed uprising or insurgency by forces loyal to the government. It encompasses the socio-economic, military, political, diplomatic and intelligence tactics a state uses to combat terrorism (Crelinsten, 2013; Roberts, 2023). It is defined as the methods, procedures, strategies and tactics used by governments, international coalitions and organisations to stop and fight terrorism in all of its manifestations. Law enforcement operations, arrest, prosecution, conviction, sentencing, deradicalisation of potential terrorists, military strikes, border control, intelligence gathering, financial tracking, conciliation strategies like diplomacy and amnesty, community engagement, rehabilitations and policies are some examples of these tactics (Nyadera & Bincof, 2019; Okoye, 2021; Stigall *et al.*, 2019). Based on the foregoing, the term "counter-terrorism strategies" refer to any combination of kinetic and non-kinetic tactics, strategies and procedures that a nation or its organisations employ to prevent or minimise terrorist attacks.

Security

The concept of security is a contentious issue due to differing views among scholars, influenced by historical and philosophical contexts, people's ideas, culture and

perceptions of reality (Rosenje *et al.*, 2022b). Security is the capacity to anticipate, adjust to, endure and recover from threats and crises brought on by people's wilful, malicious and intentional actions, such as terrorism, sabotage, organised crime or hacking. As a result, security is the condition of being safe from risks, hazards or injury (Jore, 2019; Ibrahim, 2023). It is thought to be a situation in which individuals or groups are safe and unafraid of hunger, health and having access to decent work, as well as of physical or psychological abuse, assault, persecution or death (Asmau & Abdulrasheed, 2020). Security is the state that arises from the implementation and upkeep of safeguards that guarantee an unassailable state free from adversarial actions or influences (Ken, 2018). In another view, security is as a condition of mental calm, uncertainty-free living and worry-free living (Ubakanma *et al.*, 2025).

Security is the state of affairs that encourages or supports a peaceful, orderly and serene environment that ensures growth and the accomplishment of personal or collective goals (Rosenje *et al.*, 2022a). It refers to the availability of necessary commodities and services, resilience against possible risk or injury and protection from hostile forces. Thus, it refers to the capacity of the state and non-state security apparatus to control and avoid fear, uncertainty and damage that could stifle peace and progress (Yusuf & Mohd, 2022). Deducing from the aforementioned definitions, security emphasises the lack of harm or danger to people's lives and material possessions, as well as to the state.

Human Rights

Human rights, often referred to as fundamental rights or natural rights by all standards, are rights that are associated with specific freedoms or privileges that are considered to be inherent to the human condition and that society cannot deny (Oluka *et al.*, 2022). Human rights are defined as universal principles and legal protections that are intended to shield people, and occasionally groups, from acts and inactions largely committed by the government or its agents, which frequently infringe on fundamental freedoms, obligations and human dignity. They are rights held by individuals simply because they are part of human species. Regardless of sex, ethnicity, nationality or economic status, everyone has the same rights (Samson, 2020). Human rights are those liberties that are necessary for a person to continue to be happy with himself, his fellow humans and his capacity to engage in a complex society; they cannot be said to have been granted to him by man, but rather are earned by him just by virtue of his humanity (Agbonika, 2017; Bello & Mela, 2022).

In its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations affirms that everyone has the right to freedom, life, liberty and personal security, among other rights. The proclamation denounces arbitrary arrest, torture, cruel or humiliating treatment and slavery in all its manifestations (Ekpo, 2016). Thus, human rights can be perceived as natural entitlements and priviledges enjoyed by all people, essentially because they are humans. These priviledges are sacred, personal and germane, and as such should not be denied.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts public choice theory, an economic theory that was propounded in the 1950s and made prominent in 1986 by James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock. They applied the theory to examine how people behave in marketplaces, which can also be borrowed to politics and governance. Kennet Arrow (1963), Duncan Black (1987), Anthony Downs (1957), William Niskanen (1971), Mancur Olson (1965) and William Rikey (1962) are other contributors to the theory's development. In group decision-making, it is also used to guide people's behaviour. According to the theory, individuals in politics as well as governance act in their own best interests while others base their decisions on those of others. Sometimes, selfish interest rather than the interests of others drives people's actions, whether they are voters, politicians or policy maker and implementer in politics and governance (Oluka *et al.*, 2022; Shughart & Razzolini, 2001).

Public choice theorists also maintained that while individuals operating in the politics and governance frequently have other interests, their primary motivation is self-interest, whether they are bureaucrats, politicians, lobbyists or voters. Another aspect of public choice is the modeling of people's actions as motivated by the objective of utility maximisation. Similar to the economic model of rational behaviour that it is based on, the theory makes the assumption that people are primarily motivated by their own self-interests. Additionally, public choice theorists noted that government failure has consequences, meaning that sometimes government actions do not have the intended outcomes (Butler, 2012; Shaw, 2002; Shughart, 2019).

For instance, government's actions towards ensuring security against terrorism through counter-terrorism do not often achieve the intended outcomes, as selfish interest often set in during implementation. This is evident in series of allegation of human rights' violations against the implementers of counter-terrorism strategies in Nigeria. This brings to the fore, the importance of analysing constitutional rules in public decision-making, focusing on the "Calculus of Consent" by Buchanan and

Tullock (1962). It was argued that a really just collective choice or one that is founded on the public interest would be one that all citizens, including voters, would universally support. Even though reaching consensus is frequently challenging or practically impossible, public decision-makers should make effort to weigh the interests of the public or citizens when making decisions that will likely have an impact on them (Oluka *et al.*, 2022).

The theory has been criticised on several grounds. For instance, it is argued that people, mostly policy-maker and implementers, always act in their self-interest, which is not always the case at all times. It ignores how elements like social conventions and beliefs influence political conduct. The theory also oversimplifies complex political processes and fails to capture the full range of factors influencing public policy outcomes. Another criticism of public choice theory is that it places too much emphasis on the shortcomings of the government. It disregards a number of government accomplishments and the ways that policies advance shared goals. Many public goods are efficiently provided by governments. In spite of these criticisms, the theory offers a framework for comprehending the factors that influence public policy outcomes, especially in terms of counter-terrorism strategies, highlighting potential inefficiency and self-interest in government decision-making.

It is necessary to point out that while implementing counter-terrorism strategies in Nigeria, respect for the rule of law and the protection of human rights should co-exist harmoniously with ensuring security. This is frequently in the public interest and should be directed or provided by the government through its security agencies, such as the police, military and other law enforcement agencies. This suggests that upholding the state's security should not infringe upon the rights of individuals. Therefore, government security agencies in the process of executing counter-terrorism strategies and ensuring peace and security in the country should be guided by public interest, while respecting the rule of law and protecting human rights.

Overview of Terrorism in Nigeria

Terrorism has been a global issue since ancient times, with early groups like the Zealots of Judea and Assassins eliminating Roman occupation forces. With the rise of nation-states, terrorism expanded to include politics, religion, insurrection and ethnic strife. Also, early acts of terrorism include the killing of Israelite children by Pharaoh of Egypt and slaying of children in Bethlehem by King Herod. Terrorist attacks have become more fatal in the past 50 years, with recent attacks adding a new dimension (Dibia, 2021).

Terrorism in Africa and Nigeria dates back to the era of slavery, where European imperialists exploited human resources. This brutal trade resulted in mass murder, extinction of communities and internecine wars. The second wave of terrorism in Nigeria was a product of colonial clampdowns, known as "gunboat diplomacy". British bombardments and the Maxim gun were used against Nigerian belligerents, highlighting the political motive behind colonialism (Yahaya, 2015; Omeje, 2013). The third wave of terrorism in Nigeria was during the colonial rule; when force and terror were relied on to enforce colonial's policies. For example, in 1929, 31 unarmed women were murdered for resisting alien taxation. The Oku-Ogun group faced a three-year violence campaign, resulting in 10,000 deaths (Amadi *et al.*, 2024; Ekpo, 2016).

During colonial and independence periods, Ogboni and Awopa groups were known for killings, lootings and armed robbery. 1986 marked a watershed in terrorism in Nigeria with the killings of Dele Giwa by a "letter bomb", the hijacking of a Nigerian Airways aircraft by the Movement for the Advancement of Democracy in October 1993 while in August 1994, Shed 6 of Ilorin Stadium was torn apart by a ferocious bombing (Omale, 2013; Mahmood & Ani, 2018). More so, during Ibrahim Babangida's regime, economic downturn and rising inflation led to shade of criminal activities with terrorism. Ethnic militias like O'odua People's Congress (OPC), Arewa Youth Consultative Forum (AYCF), Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Anambra State Vigilante Service, Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), Ogoni Youth, Ijaw Youth, Bakassi Boys, Egbesu Boys, Onitsha Traders Organisation and Mambilla Militia Group among others were formed, leading to over 25,000 deaths between 1999 and 2005. These groups were responsible for various crimes and facilitated the spread of crime (Oyeniye, 2007; Amadi *et al.*, 2024).

Religious-based terrorism in Nigeria dates back to the 14th century when Islam arrived in Bornu and gained legitimacy under Idris Aloma. Radicalisation began in 1804, led by Usman Dan Fodio, who waged Jihad against Hausa kingdoms. This radicalisation was aided by Abubakar Gumi and Sir Ahmadu Bello in the 1960s (Besenyo & Mayer, 2015). In the 1960s, Northern Nigeria abandoned Sharia as part of the "settlement" for a united Nigeria. Ahmadu Bello led a contingent to return to Sharia, leading to the Izala Movement, a religious revival group (Crisis Group Africa Report, 2014; Kamalu, 2020).

The 1979 Shiite militants' victory over the Iranian government led to Muslim fanatics like Zakzaky introducing a pro-Iranian Shiite version of Islam into Northern Nigeria in the 1980s. Mohammed Marwa, known as Maitatsine, was known for his violent sermons against Western culture. Marwa's brutal onslaughts in 1982 claimed 4,000 lives, leading to subsequent uprisings in Bulumkutu (3,300 persons were killed), Gongola State in 1984 (1,000 persons suffered casualty) and Bauchi in 1985, resulting in numerous casualties (Tangban, 2014). In 1999, Nigeria's secular status was challenged when the constitution allowed the imposition of Sharia, leading to the introduction of Sharia in all northern states except Adamawa. This mistake has left Nigeria grappling with a dreaded Sharia-inspired group causing chaos and terror (Ekpo, 2016; Agbu *et al.*, 2020).

Nigeria's violent history was also impacted by the emergence of the Niger Delta militancy in the 1990s, using guerrilla warfare and terrorism to gain revenue in lieu of environmental damage caused by oil spillage. This led to economic disruption and conflicts with government forces. In the 2000s, Mohammed Yusuf established Boko Haram, an Islamist militant group, which initially engaged in nonviolent activism but escalated into violent extremism after a government crackdown (Makai, 2024; Oladimeji, 2019). The 2014 Chibok schoolgirl kidnapping by Boko Haram exposed the group's violent methods, resulting in over 30,000 deaths and millions of displacement in Nigeria (Amnesty International, 2011). The group's involvement with other extremist organisations like ISWAP further complicates the country's terrorism history (Zenn, 2020). As of present as the government fights the Boko Haram group's violent actions, another terrorist organisation called "Lukarawa" or "Lakurawa" has surfaced in the Northwest of Nigeria, namely in Sokoto and Kebbi States. This group poses a threat to important governance advancements in these sub-national enclaves (Achi, 2024; Afolaranmi, 2024).

Scholars such as Adedire *et al.* (2016), Ibrahim (2023), Kamalu (2020), Oladimeji (2019) and Sarafa-Yusuf (2022) argued that factors such as inequality, poverty, corruption**,** unemployment, bad governance, religious extremism, porous borders, light and small weaponry proliferation, defective intelligence gathering and coordination, political avarice, weak institutions and foreign influence, among others, are all linked to the rise of terrorism in Nigeria.

3. Methodology

The paper adopted the desk review approach, which is qualitative and explorative in nature, to examined terrorism and counter-terrorism strategies in Nigeria, with a view

to striking a balance between security and human rights. It is pertinent since it aids researcher in obtaining crucial information from previously published works in the relevant fields. Thus, textbooks, journal articles, official government documents, reporting from newspapers and magazines, and online resources were all dependable sources of data for this paper. This approach was adopted because of its reliability and consistency.

4. Results and Discussions

Counter-Terrorism Strategies in Nigeria

A number of strategies have been tried to combat terrorism in the country, including stepping up counter-terrorism cooperation with international partners and neighbouring countries, being receptive to political dialogue with terrorist organisations and individuals and focusing on economic inclusion for the poor and jobless in Nigerian society, particularly in the North East. The government also enacted the Terrorism Prevention Act 2011, the Money Laundering Act 2011, Terrorism Proscription Oder 2013, the deployment of Joint Task Forces, the creation of a special joint military task force, the temporary closure of borders, capacity building, the equipping of security forces, and the installation of numerous closed-circuit television systems as additional measures to checkmate terrorism (Ikedinma, 2021).

The Nigerian government partnered with international organisations like the African Union, United Nations and European Union to combat the terrorism. Initially, the government viewed terrorism groups like Boko Haram as a minor threat, but signed agreements with the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) to facilitate joint military operations, intelligence sharing, hostage negotiations, training and financial assistance (Hairiya, 2017; Yayla & Yahaya, 2023). The Nigerian Army also formed a 277-man anti-Boko Haram and Terrorism Special Force in 2012 in an effort to curb the sect's lethal actions in the country (Pogoson, 2013). In addition, Nigeria backed the International Criminal Court's (ICC) decision to detain, try and prosecute terrorists. The Department of Security Service (DSS), Nigerian Customs Service, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Immigration and local vigilantes, which include local hunters, were also part of the inter-agency taskforce group that the government established in 2007 as the National Focal Point on Terrorism (Ikedinma, 2021).

Furthermore, the Nigerian government implemented initiatives to combat terrorist indoctrination, including the Perception Management Programme and hiring Islamic

clerics to disseminate moderate Islamic doctrine. These programmes aim to help those drawn to radical rhetoric and refute extreme religious views, particularly targeting young people vulnerable to terrorist radical ideology (Yayla & Yahaya, 2023). Holistically, Nigeria's government has used military strategies to combat terrorism, leading to short-term successes and long-term unintended consequences (Ikedinma, 2021). For instance, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) faced initial success in combating terrorism in the country in 2016. However, lack of clear mandate, understanding of neo-patrimonial politics, under-estimation of terrorist's threats, inability to adapt to new threats, and unclear role of vigilantes in the MNJTF structure slow down the efforts in recent years (Ajala, 2021).

Also, state-sponsored vigilantism in Nigeria has been a significant focus since 2010, particularly in the fight against terrorism. The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Northeast Nigeria, formed in 2013, worked alongside state forces against terrorist groups like Boko Haram as "knowledge brokers" to identify and capture insurgents in their communities. The CJTF supports the government to ensure security in the communities they protect (Agbiboa, 2020). However, this has led to increased civilian casualties and human rights abuses, such as the recruitment of child soldiers and extra-judicial killings (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020). Concerns have also been raised about the CJTF's integration into a "local war economy" and its misuse of power for personal gain (Vanda, 2020). However, the success of the CJTF may lead to another angry armed group in the troubled Northeast (Alozieuwa, 2021; Ajala & Murphy, 2025).

Evaluating Counter-terrorism Strategies, Security and Human Rights in Nigeria

In general, the government has significant challenges in its fight against terrorism. Despite the measures implemented to combat terrorism, the threat appears to be overtaxing the government and has not yet shown a discernible impact in reducing the danger posed by the menace of terrorism. Instead, human rights, civil liberties, individuals and children's rights have allegedly been violated and alienated by the Nigerian government's counter-terrorism activities (Ikedinma, 2021; Njoku, 2017).

Over the past years, Nigeria has been actively combating terrorism through the involvement of armed pro-government vigilante groups, such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) which was formed in 2013. They worked alongside state forces against terrorism as "information brokers" to identify and capture terrorists in their communities and surrounding regions (Aina & Odiji, 2019; Agbiboa, 2020).

However, this has led to increased civilian casualties and intensified violence in reprisal attacks. The CJTF's power has gone largely unchecked, including human rights abuses and extra-judicial killings (Ajala & Murphy, 2025; Vanda, 2020).

Government's military counter-terrorism offensives, such as Operation Restore Order, have been characterised by extra-judicial killings, intimidation and unwarranted arrests of local residents. These actions have had negative effects on the government response, leading to the regrouping of terrorists. The widespread hate towards police and government soldiers in regions like Maiduguri has emboldened the terrorist groups to conduct more attacks on government institutions (Yayla & Yahaya, 2023). Though terrorism has resulted in the deaths of over 35,000 people since 2009 (Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect, 2023), with over 2,400 incidents of severe violations against children, limited access to education and 1.8 million internally displaced persons (UN Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2023), the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (2023) and Amnesty International (2022) highlighted that Nigerian security forces have committed human rights violations during counter-terrorism operations, including excessive force, enforced disappearances, restrictions on freedom of expression, extra-judicial killings, rape, torture and arbitrary arrest and detentions against the people and particularly suspected Boko Haram and Islamic State members.

Right to life is sacred and cannot be deprived of, except in court-ordered procedures as permissible by the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. However, Nigerians face human rights violations of right to life due to attacks and extortion by security agencies during counter-terrorism (Igwe, 2020). Extra-judicial killings are a common issue, with government authorities targeting specific people for death. Nigeria's military has been conducting deadly airstrikes, such as Operation Cat Race and Operation Crocodile Smile, resulting in hundreds of civilian casualties due to inadequate military protection (Aniekwe, 2023; Mustafa & Ezeamaka, 2019). For instances, on December 5, 2020, the Nigerian army carried out airstrikes during a religious ritual in Tudun Biri, Kaduna State, killing at least 85 civilians extra-judicially and seriously injuring dozens more. The deceased, whose identity could not be verified, were interred in mass graves (Sobowale, 2023; The Guardian, 2023).

Nigeria has a strong legal framework prohibiting torture, including the United Nations Convention against Torture and the Optional Protocol. However, the country still uses torture and ill-treatment of civilians, including physical, mental and

psychological torture, at various levels of arrest, detention and enforced disappearances during counter-terrorism operations (Samson, 2020). Accountability mechanisms for perpetrators of torture remain weak or non-existent while the human toll of these attacks is on the increase, with thousands of deaths, millions of internal displacement and refugees. The heavy-handed responses to terrorism adopted by security agencies have escalated violence against communities and security forces themselves (Nwagwu & Enwelum, 2024). To underscore this scenario, it was reported that Nigerian military forces have extra-judicially executed over 1,200 people, arbitrarily arrested at least 20,000 people and committed countless acts of torture (Amnesty International Nigeria, 2022).

Section 35 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) guarantees personal liberty to all citizens, but security agencies have sometimes unlawfully arrest and detain citizens without a crime or at a suspicion of involvement in terrorist attacks. This has led to enforced disappearance, a serious abridges of fundamental rights such as the right to life, integrity, security, presumption of innocence, due process, free development of personality, right to defence and fair hearing before the court. Enforced disappearances have occurred in response to armed conflict and counter-terrorism operations against Boko Haram, herder-farmer clashes, militancy for separatist agitation and communal clash, among others (Ajala & Murphy, 2025). Security personnel detained Sunday and Calista Ifedi, a couple, from their Enugu residence on November 23, 2021, on suspicion of being members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (*The Guardian,* 2021).

Terrorism in Nigeria prompted increase of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Security agencies have been accused of violating IDPs' rights, particularly raping girls and women. IDPs are entitled to guarantee rights under international, regional and national laws, as citizens or habitual residents of their country (Ikebundu, 2023). However, Amnesty Annual Report (2021) highlights the humanitarian crisis resulting from Boko Haram and security forces, affecting over fourteen million people, including IDPs. The report also mentions police's activities in violating IDPs' rights, including overcrowding and inadequate food, clothing and medical care. Human Rights Watch (2012) alleged that Nigeria Police Force and Nigeria Army personnel rape young girls and women in IDP camps, and that they are abandoned when they become pregnant without receiving necessary support.

Section 357 of the Criminal Code Act defines rape as any person who has unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl without her consent or with her consent, if the consent is obtained by force, threats, intimidation and fear of harm or false representation. Section 358 provides for punishment as life imprisonment, with the possible addition of caning. Despite this, the Nigerian government is failing in its national and international obligations to prevent, investigate and prosecute rape cases resulting from counter-terrorism actions as well as to provide reparations to victims. Security agencies have also been alleged of rape during counter-terrorism operations as well as use the element of force to intimidate the population, humiliating and dehumanising women and their communities. Women were held in sexual slavery in military barracks and repeatedly raped. These are gross violation of human rights in Nigeria (Nwagwu & Enwelum, 2024).

More so, the Nigerian government's counter-terrorism strategies have significantly impacted the rights and freedoms of children. These measures include restrictions on movements, arbitrary arrests, mass and illegal detention, punitive interrogative measures, confinement, starvation and denial of access to medical and health facilities. Children, especially boys, are often arrested with little or no evidence and subjected to inhumane conditions in overcrowded cells and detention centers. The Nigerian military detained over 3,600 children between January 2013 and March 2019 as suspects involved with Boko Haram terrorists (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Children's rights to liberty and freedom have been curtailed through humiliation and denial of human rights by state agencies. The military provides no formal education or rehabilitation activities for children in detention and allegations of sexual violence against girls have been leveled against the Nigerian Security forces. The denial of requisite medical, psychological and mental support for victims of abuse often batters the psyche of the children, leading to secluded lives and negative psychological outcomes (Okoli & Azom 2019; Amnesty International, 2018; Amaka, n.d).

The Nigerian Constitution and various international laws guarantee the enjoyment of human rights. However, in practice, the country during its counter-terrorism operations often violates these human rights for the sake of ensuring security. Nigerian law enforcement agencies often infringe on citizens' rights to life, privacy, right to unlawful arrest, detention and torture, personal security, freedom of association and discrimination, against people arrested on suspicious on terrorism charges.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Terrorism is a complex global issue, which has significant negative impact on human life, property and the general security situation, necessitating various counter-terrorism strategies by the country to address and rescue the situation. Nigeria has implemented various strategies to combat terrorism which include the conciliatory model, the criminal justice (due process) model and the military model. The military models such as the Multinational Joint Taskforce (MNJTF), Operations Restore Order I, II and III, and Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), among others, are the most preferred counter-terrorism strategies in the country. However, these counter-terrorism strategies often infringes on citizens' rights to life, privacy, right to unlawful arrest, right to security, freedom of association and discrimination, against people arrested on suspects on terrorism charges. Thus, the paper concluded that the security agencies during the implementation of counter-terrorism strategies towards ensuring adequate of security life and property often end-up violating human rights of the people in the country.

Therefore, in order to balance security and human rights while fighting terrorism through counter-terrorism, the following recommendations are offered:

i. Government should set up judicial investigation into the security forces' counter-terrorism operations, prosecute those suspected of violating human rights and guarantee the protection of Nigerian civilians' and minorities' rights in accordance with Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
ii. Government should ensure that counter-terrorism strategies adhere to international humanitarian law and human rights norms, prioritise civilian protection, and address poverty, marginalisation and social inequity through inclusive development programmes and community participation.
iii. Government should reform law enforcement agencies code of operation, including the Nigeria Police Force, military and paramilitary forces to combat violence, impunity and human rights violation while ensuring security. This is will promote harmonious police-public or community relations, and increase public trust and confidence towards the police in particular.
iv. Judicial independence and access to justice should be strengthened because upholding the rule of law and guaranteeing justice are essential for defending human rights. Therefore, improving legal aid services, judicial independence and competence can help with human rights violations during counter-terrorism and their remedies.

v. The National Orientation Agency, Civil Society Organisations, media and religious leaders should promote human rights education and awareness. Human rights education and awareness-raising programmes are crucial for promoting respect for rights and civic involvement while countering terrorism. Focus should be on law enforcement, judges, civil society and the general public, while ensuring media freedom and expression.

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